



Business challenge

Relying on disparate financial systems and error-prone processes, ULMA Packaging couldn't quickly provide leaders with detailed, reliable insights into its businesses, subsidiaries and workforces.

Transformation

After rapid expansion left ULMA Packaging with siloed financial systems, the Spanish cooperative turned to IBM Business Partner LKS Financial Solutions & Corporate (FS&C) for help. With a comprehensive IBM® Cognos® platform, ULMA Packaging dramatically accelerated planning, consolidation and reporting, and its decision-makers gained real-time access to accurate insights.



Iñaki Alzibar
Finance
Controlling
Manager
ULMA Packaging

Results

86% faster and more accurate corporate reporting
with an AI-infused digital platform

Speeds enterprisewide budget planning
through quick access to high-quality financial data

Supports global growth and innovation
with more agile processes, such as streamlining subsidiary onboarding

ULMA Packaging

A high-growth global cooperative makes data-driven decisions with IBM Cognos

Based in Spain in Oñati, Gipuzkoa, [ULMA Packaging](#) (external link) supplies packaging equipment, systems and services for a broad range of food and healthcare product lines. It uses advanced methods and technologies to develop offerings that enable product protection and presentation using sustainable materials. ULMA Packaging employs approximately 1,730 people globally and generated total worldwide sales of EUR 287 million in 2020. It is one of nine cooperatives within the ULMA Group, part of the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in northern Spain.

“We have broken down departmental boundaries and now have one data source, one truth, across all the company.”

— Iñaki Alzibar, Finance Controlling Manager, ULMA Packaging



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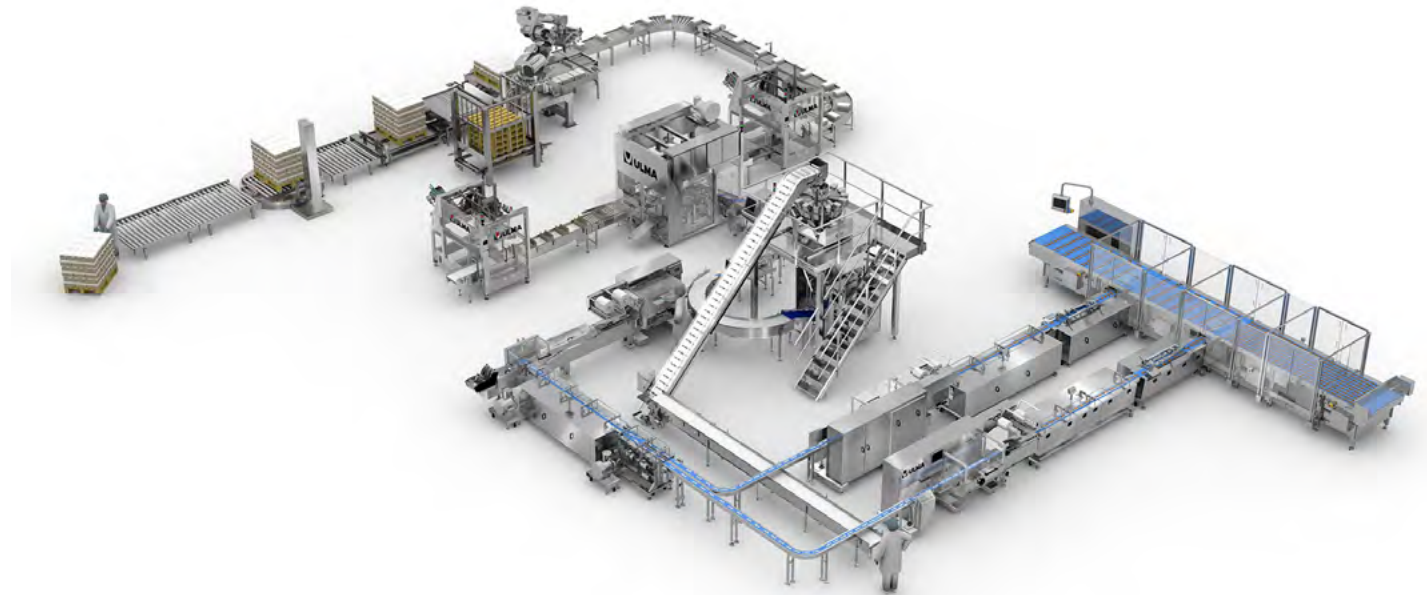


Unwrapping financial insights

Product packaging does much more than help promote sales and convey important information. It can enable convenience in shipping, sales and consumption; prevent tampering and theft; and in the case of perishable foods and other sensitive items, maintain product freshness and safety.

Based in the Basque region of Spain, ULMA Packaging has mastered the art and science of packaging. Organized as a cooperative, it designs and manufactures innovative equipment and systems for packaging food and medical and pharmaceutical products in various ways. Using ULMA Packaging's flow pack, traysealing, thermoforming, shrink and other automated systems, customers can optimize output while better safeguarding products.

Demand for high-quality packaging and cutting-edge packaging technologies has skyrocketed in the past 15 years, according to Iñaki Alzibar, Finance Controlling Manager at ULMA Packaging. Given industry growth, leaders at ULMA Packaging seized the opportunity to expand the business internationally. Over the past decade, the company acquired and created approximately 20 new subsidiaries and grew its distribution network across 50 countries. It also secured several new enterprise customers and doubled its sales.



The flip side to this success was that financial and operational teams collected and managed huge volumes of information using siloed systems and error-prone manual processes. A lack of standardization prevented enterprisewide data visibility and control, which slowed executive planning and budgeting, consolidation and reporting processes in the Finance and Internal Control department. “Our team spent a lot of time collecting data and confirming its accuracy, which wasn't practical,” says Alzibar.

‘One data source, one truth’

Alzibar's vision was to democratize ULMA Packaging's financial data so that executives, line-of-business (LOB) managers and subsidiary leaders could quickly access accurate, up-to-date information to guide decision-making. This work required standardizing and automating all of the company's financial management systems using digital technologies.

Without hesitating, Alzibar turned to LKS for assistance. In addition to providing industry and IT expertise, LKS had built long-standing relationships across ULMA Packaging. The team understood the unique, complex challenges related to consolidating its multinational finances.

“For us, LKS is more than a supplier. They are a partner,” comments Alzibar. “We have known each other for more than 10 years, and they understand perfectly the company,

our culture and how we move, and this is extremely important to us. In my department, we have a lot of work and only six people. LKS can react very fast to all our needs.”

LKS helped Alzibar and his team develop and implement a Cognos platform that includes the following AI-infused solutions:

- IBM Planning Analytics powered by TM1® solution for planning, budgeting and forecasting
- IBM Cognos Controller software for closing, consolidation and reporting
- IBM Cognos Analytics business intelligence solution for data preparation, analysis and visualization

Supported by an on-premises infrastructure, the solutions integrate seamlessly with each other, ERP, CRM, HRMS and other systems used by ULMA Packaging LOBs and subsidiaries, unifying the company's financial functions on a single platform. “Unlike other technology providers, IBM offers a full suite of tools in all areas of finance,” explains Alzibar.

LKS helped pace the complex project over several years so that ULMA Packaging could continue to meet ongoing operational and regulatory requirements, including creation of monthly and annual financial reports.

Having completed the transformation, ULMA Packaging can provide decision-makers with a trusted

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source of high-quality financial data. “We have broken down departmental boundaries and now have one data source, one truth, across the whole company,” says Alzibar. The company has also standardized processes using the Cognos solution's built-in, automated workflows.

With faster data access and newly streamlined processes, the Finance and Internal Control team can rapidly complete timely corporate-level reports. In addition, the board of directors can view financial performance metrics and insights on an interactive business intelligence dashboard with detailed scorecards built by LKS using the IBM Planning Analytics Workspace tool.

Alzibar's team also created multiple other customized scorecards that give managers detailed information and analyses on their specific business financials, such as sales performance, purchasing and cost centers, and workforce efficiencies.

“ULMA Packaging has numerous businesses and production plants all over the world,” explains Andrés Bedia, Commercial Manager at LKS FS&C. “When planning their annual budgets, each commercial entity needs to estimate not only what and how much they are going to sell in the next year but also how much they are going to spend to manufacture equipment, compensate workers and so on. They need very detailed, accurate information.”

Speeds corporate reporting by 86%

Alzibar's team can now generate income, balance sheets and other corporate and regulatory reports 86% faster, having reduced the time required for each report from approximately one week to 1 – 2 days. With nearly error-free, automated processes, the team is also confident in the data's accuracy and quality.

ULMA Packaging also accelerated and improved annual budget planning and budgeting review processes. Finance and other teams across the company—and not just in the corporate office—can draw on detailed, accurate data to make more precise forecasts.

Furthermore, with financial data and processes standardized on the Cognos platform, Alzibar's small team can rapidly onboard new subsidiaries and train their employees on ULMA Packaging best practices. It can also

dedicate more time to supporting other strategic initiatives, such as development of innovative packaging solutions. These efficiencies enable the company to continue expanding its business with greater agility and speed, just as the COVID-19 pandemic drives demand for safe product packaging ever higher.

Alzibar emphasizes that the digital transformation in financing is an important step forward in achieving data democratization across the company. “Little by little, we are establishing the fundamentals to convert ULMA Packaging into a truly data-driven organization,” he says.

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—Andrés Bedia, Commercial Manager, IBM Business Partner LKS Financial Solutions & Corporate

Solution components

- IBM® Cognos® Analytics
- IBM Cognos Controller
- IBM Planning Analytics powered by TM1®

Take the next step

To learn more about the IBM solutions featured in this story, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner.

About LKS Financial Solutions & Corporate

IBM Business Partner [LKS FS&C](#) (external link), based in Bilbao, Bizkaia, Spain, offers comprehensive financial services designed to help midsize and large companies capitalize on the advantages of the new digital era. Its consultant team combines in-depth strategic and functional knowledge of financial management processes with critical technical capabilities to deliver global solutions. LKS FS&C is part of LKS Next group, one of the largest professional services firms in northern Spain. Founded 30 years ago, LKS Next employs more than 600 people and earned 2019 sales revenue of EUR 50 million.

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